

Commercial Building  
7 St. Michael Street  
Mobile  
Mobile County  
Alabama

HABS No. ALA-792

HABS  
ALA,  
49-MOBI,  
164-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ALA-792

COMMERCIAL BUILDING

Location: 7 St. Michael Street, Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama.  
Geographic Location Code: 01-2100-097

Present Use: Demolished for Water Street Urban Renewal Project, 1968.

Statement of This small commercial building is typical of structures  
Significance: built in the 1830's in Mobile's active waterfront district.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1. Date of erection: Before 1834.
2. Architect: unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: As indicated in the following chain of title, this building, with facades on St. Michael Street and Planter's Alley and enclosed on either side by other commercial buildings, had already been constructed when the land was sold in 1835. Reference is the Probate Court Record Division, Mobile County.

1834 Deed February 7, 1834 in Book L page 292

M.D. Eslava

to

Maria Beylle

"...in consideration of...(\$3,600)...hath granted...  
all that certain lot of land...(30' x 84')...on  
which...is erected a two story building..."

1834 Deed February 17, 1834 in Book M page 444

Joseph Beylle & Com.

to

D.M. Eslava

(\$5,400)

1835 Deed April 1, 1835 in Book N page 428

D.M. Eslava

to

J.F. Roberts

(\$12,000)

1837 Deed June 1, 1837 in Book S page 574

J. F. Roberts

to

Jasper Strong

"...in consideration of the sum of...(\$19,960)... ALA  
hath granted...all that certain lot of land... 49-MOB  
fronting on St. Michael and Planters Streets... 164-  
having a front on each street of...(30')...and a  
depth of...(84')...on which said lot is erected  
a two story brick building at present known as the  
Mobile Arcade--being bounded North by St. Michael  
Street, West by a tenement now or late the property  
of...Cleveland, South by Planter's Street, and East  
by a tenement now or late the property of George  
Starr--the same being the property conveyed to  
James F. Roberts by M.D. Eslava...also that other  
lot..."

1868 Deed March 17, 1868 in Book 24 page 139  
Jasper Strong  
to  
Henry Ahrens

1871 Deed August 30, 1871 in Book 29 page 245  
Charles Ahrens  
to  
O.F. Cawthorn  
(\$6,000)

1872 Deed November 1, 1872 in Book 30 page 677  
O.F. Cawthorn  
to  
Deposit Savings Corp.  
(\$1,000)

Property passes into the hands of the United States  
Government c. 1873 (Book 34 page 506)

1922 Deed August 29, 1922 in Book 195 page 473  
Factors & Trade Ins. Co.  
to  
Stewart A. LeBlanc

1942 Deed May 12, 1942 in Book 324 page 418  
Stewart A. LeBlanc  
to  
H. Abb Woodridge, Jr.

1943 Deed January 2, 1943 in Book 335 page 217  
Herb C. Brown et al  
to  
Dominick Riso

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4. Alteration and additions: The appearance of the north and south facades of this building were altered when cast-iron columns (on north facade only) and window hoods and sills were added, probably about 1860, considering the similarity of these elements with those of other buildings in the area constructed at that time. The curious cornice and parapet of the north front were probably also added during this renovation; the original undoubtedly resembled the simple denticulated cornice of the south front. Two bays of the three bay arcade of the south facade were also partially filled in and changed into windows.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Mobile Deed Books, Probate Court Record Division,  
Mobile County  
Lewis Troost Map (c. 1840), City Hall, Mobile

2. Secondary and published sources:

Southern and Southwestern Surveying and Publishing  
Company, City Atlas of Mobile, Alabama, from  
actual Surveys and Records, Baltimore, G.M. Hopkins,  
1878.

Prepared by Linda Carroll  
Student Historian  
August 22, 1966  
and  
Charles A. Herrington  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
June 20, 1972

PART 11. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This modest commercial building with handsome brickwork and decorative details of cast iron is a typical example of mid-nineteenth-century constructions in Mobile. The two arcaded facades with variations in treatment and the number of bays make this building of special interest.

2. Condition of fabric: This building was exceedingly deteriorated before demolition.

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B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This is a rectangular two story building measuring 30'-8" across the front by a depth of 84'-7". The north front consists of four bays and the south of three, treated differently.
2. Foundation: Not accessible.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: This is a brick bearing wall construction with bricks laid in a common bond (headers every fourth row). The first floor of the main facade (north, St. Michael Street) has four arched full-length openings with cast-iron fluted Corinthian columns engaged to cast-iron pilasters. The end walls form piers of masonry covered with scored plaster to simulate ashlar and have cast-iron Corinthian capitals. The south (rear) elevation is of plastered brick which is scored to simulate ashlar construction. The plaster has in general fallen from the brick. The east and west walls are party walls (now exposed) without openings.
4. Structural system, framing: The only portion of the framing which is visible is the second floor construction which consists of large, closely-spaced joists appearing to be approximately 3"-4" x 18", spanning from bearing wall to bearing wall (30'-8") with no intermediate support.
5. Stoops: Cast-iron treads cover a continuous brick and plaster stoop 18" high on the north facade. The stoop at the first and third bays from the west are cut out to form entry steps.
6. Chimneys: Since the adjacent building had been demolished, two brick chimneys are visible on the west party wall.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The north (main) facade has four arched openings on the first floor with a continuous archivolt of projecting "single-line" header bricks above. Each opening has double doors and plain plastered soffits. The doors are of heavy moulding and arched at the top. The lower wooden

panels have applied mouldings and are inset with a raised center panel. The transoms above the doors have cente-divided hinged lights forming quarter circles. The three openings in the south elevation are similar, except that two are windows rather than doors. The impression given is that only the wood panelling has been omitted from these two openings and that they too were formerly doors.

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- b. Windows and shutters: The windows of the second floor are all identical and consist of round-headed double-hung wooden sash with four-over-four lights. All windows have cast-iron sills and hood moulda, or cornices, supported on "corinthianesque" brackets; the hood mouldings are composed of three bands: a beaded motif, egg-and-dart, and acanthus leaves.

#### 8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: There is a hip roof covered with slate.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Over the first-floor arcade of the north elevation there is a projecting cornice of brick-sized dentils and a plastered frieze, enclosed at the sides by corbelled brick brackets. Above, a curious intricate corbelled brick cornice and parapet crown the facade. The south elevation has projecting brick string courses over the first story, and a simple brick denticulated cornice above.

#### C.. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: The first floor is one large high room. The second floor has an interior partition dividing the front from the rear.
- 2. Stairways: There is a makeshift flight of stairs on the west wall near the north end of the building, possibly located in the original stairwell.
- 3. Flooring: First floor, modern cement; second floor, fairly narrow random-width board flooring.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The first floor walls have plaster directly on the brick walls and there is evidence of lath and plaster on the underside of the exposed ceiling construction. The second floor walls are plaster on wooden lath and there is a narrow beaded board ceiling in the north room.

5. Doorways and doors: No interior doorways original to the building remain. On the second floor, the single interior partition that would have contained a doorway has been stripped. ALA.  
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  6. Trim: On the second floor, there is a plain wooden base board approximately 8" high and a narrow wooden crown moulding. No trim remains on the first floor. 164-
  7. Heating: There is one fireplace on the east wall of the second story in the north room that has a stone mantel and round opening; there was originally a second fireplace on the west wall of the south room, second story.
- D. General setting and orientation: This building is located in an extensive nineteenth-century commercial and wharf district, and is located on the south side of St. Michael Street between Commerce and Water Streets, facing north on St. Michael and also with a south facade on Planter's Alley.

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins  
 Supervising Architect  
 National Park Service  
 July 22, 1966  
 and  
 John C. Poppeliers  
 Architectural Historian  
 National Park Service  
 August 29, 1966

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as a cooperative project during the summer of 1966 between the Historic American Buildings Survey and various agencies, organizations, and individuals of the City of Mobile. The Historic American Buildings Survey supplied the project supervisor, Woodrow W. Wilkins, and three draughtsmen, Carl J. Rosenberg (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Michael R. Foil (Auburn University) and Lowell K. West (University of Kentucky). One draughtsman, Elbert L. Coleman (Alabama A & M), was provided by the Mobile Housing Board, which agency administers urban renewal. The services of an additional draughtsman, James Eley, specifically designated as an architectural student from Auburn University, were made possible by contributions from numerous local architects and businessmen. The Historic Mobile Preservation Society, in agreement with the History Department of Springhill College, provided a student historian, Linda Carroll. Office space was supplied by the City of Mobile through the City Planning

Commission. Roy Thigpen, a local photographer, was contracted to supply the photographs. All local arrangements were made by the Mobile Historic Development Commission, Mrs. Nancy N. Holmes, President. The project was edited during the summer of 1972 by Charles A. Herrington, Architectural Historian, in a cooperative effort between the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Mobile Historic Development Commission.

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